

CHAPTER X

THE WAR YEARS

For reasons which they were far too intelligent not to see, and far too candid not to admit, the great agitation of 1909-12 was a failure. The intense activity of those years gave them, it is true, a kind of visible prominence and recognised potency as public figures. For this, they cared little, he, indeed, positively disliked it. Anyhow, it was no offset to the realisation, as part cause of that failure, of a strong tide of feeling obviously setting in, derived from emotions and ideas in which they disbelieved and of which they disapproved, and leading to a kind of action they regarded, at best, as irrelevant, and, at worst, as pernicious.

As, in 1899, they returned from the New World to find the Old in the grips of all the tumultuous passions of the South African War, so, very soon after their return from China, Japan and India in the winter of 1911, they became aware of a ferment brewing. Its full outcome they could not foresee but they could and did see that it threatened to undermine nearly everything they believed in. It is the major advantage of any extended absence from one's own land that, on return, an outline looms up at one such as can rarely be perceived by the immersed inhabitant. An outline loomed up at them in 1911, it disquieted them, profoundly.

It is become habitual to-day to look back upon the pre-war decade, and above all, the two or three years immediately preceding the fatal "stumble into

catastrophe/*